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7 May 1976

DCI BRIEFING FOR SENATE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

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ETHIOPIA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

I. Ethiopia's military regime is facing increasing strains and pressures both domestically and externally.

A. The ruling military council has only lukewarm popular support; its authoritarian rule and socialist policies have alienated almost all segments of the society.

B. The 110-member council is divided by ideological and ethnic differences and personal rivalries.

1. Major Mengistu Hailemariam, the council's first vice-chairman, is the ruling group's single most influential member. He is largely responsible for the council's sharp turn leftward in recent months. In April, Mengistu announced a distinctly Marxist program as the guide for transforming Ethiopian society.

2. Mengistu's leadership and radical policies are not supported by all council members, and his bid for personal power seems likely to set off another round of maneuvering.

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C. Any move to oust the council would have to come from within the military. Discontent in the military is widespread, but the dissidents are disorganized and leaderless and appear to pose no immediate threat to the council.

II. The absence of strong leadership in Addis Ababa has weakened the whole fabric of society.

A. The most pressing problems include indiscipline and low morale in the armed forces, heightened ethnic and religious antagonisms, and organized insurrections in the provinces led by the council's rightist opponents.

B. Insurgents supported by Somalia are also posing and increasingly serious threat in southern and eastern Ethiopia.

III. The secessionist movement in Eritrea Province is still the most serious insurgency. Neither side has the ability to overcome the other, but the prospects for a peaceful settlement are bleak.

A. The council is planning a new offensive against the guerrillas, which will probably begin within the next six weeks. The operation is to be spearheaded by recently formed ^{peasant} militias recruited in neighboring provinces. The peasants are to be given land in Eritrea in return for fighting. The peasants are of different ethnic and religious backgrounds than most of the rebels.

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B. The offensive probably will not be decisive, and will place additional burdens on the government's already overtaxed logistic capabilities.

IV. Ethiopia's domestic problems have left it ill-prepared to cope with a likely confrontation with Somalia over the French Territory of the Afars and Issas (FTAI).

A. France has agreed to grant independence to the territory. A referendum will be held this year, and a transfer of sovereignty will probably occur in early 1977.

B. Somalia pays lip service to independence for FTAI, but has not abandoned its goal of incorporating the territory. The Issas, who constitute about half the territory's population, are ethnic Somalis.

C. Ethiopia, on the other hand, is determined to prevent Somalia from dominating the FTAI and its port of Djibouti, the terminus of Ethiopia's principal rail link to the sea.

D. The Somalis, in the coming months, will probably instigate a campaign of subversion and violence in the FTAI, designed to weaken France's current resolve to keep a pro-French regime in power or to maintain a military presence after independence.

E. Cuba is providing Somalia some military training and

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guerrilla warfare instruction. There are at least 50 Cuban military personnel now in Somalia, but our information is fragmentary, and the number is probably higher.

F. Rather than commit its troops against a sustained insurgency, France is likely to withdraw after attempting to devise a face-saving arrangement. A French withdrawal would encourage Somalia to seize the territory by force. Ethiopia would undoubtedly go to war in that event.

V. We believe the Soviet Union would like to avoid war in the Horn.

A. Moscow, which is Somalia's principal military backer, has probably counseled President Siad to avoid risking war with Ethiopia by relying on political pressure and subversion to achieve Somali objectives.

The Soviets hope to improve their ties with Ethiopia, potentially the most important power in the Horn of Africa.

B. If there is a war between Somalia and Ethiopia, the Soviets would have little choice but to support their client in Mogadiscio. Moscow would still seek to limit the conflict and to find a political solution satisfactory to Somalia and Ethiopia.

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VI. Ethiopia's relations with the US are generally friendly but not close.

- A. The council has placed emphasis on strengthening Ethiopia's non-aligned credentials and broadening relations with communist countries, but Ethiopia's continued reliance on US military assistance restrains the council from seriously jeopardizing the ties with Washington.
- B. In the event of war with Somalia, Addis Ababa would almost certainly ask for additional US military assistance.
- C. Some council members advocate stronger military ties with communist countries, especially the Soviet Union. Moscow, however, has turned down requests for military aid, because it views the military regime as unstable and does not want to risk harming Soviet relations with Somalia.
- D. The official media in recent months have engaged in a campaign hostile to the US. Such hostility has appeared in the past and then subsided.
- E. Ethiopia, seeking to diversify somewhat its arms procurement, has used some of its ample foreign reserve to purchase limited amounts of ammunition and equipment from western and eastern European countries.

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VII. A handful of Israeli military advisers are providing counterinsurgency training to the army. Their presence jeopardizes the willingness of friendly Arab countries--especially Egypt--to lobby on behalf of Ethiopia's position toward Eritrea and the FTAI.